

**Testimony to the Senate Finance Committee regarding  
Senate Bill 264, Best Place First  
February 19, 2015**

**Ken Egan, Executive Director, Humanities Montana**

Dear Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify before you today. I appear to express Humanities Montana's strong support for Senate Bill 264, Best Place First. Simply put, Senate Bill 264 is essential for preserving Montana's historic heritage and boosting one of the state's most important industries, cultural tourism.

Let me briefly describe who we are:

Humanities Montana is an independent nonprofit organization serving the entire state of Montana through programs and grants to nonprofit organizations focused on history, literature, Native American cultures, and more. **I hope you can join us for the Governor's Humanities Awards at 3 pm this afternoon in the Capitol Rotunda celebrating six extraordinary Montanans.**

We are especially known for our contributions to rural Montana. In 2014, for instance, Humanities Montana provided 152 Speakers Bureau programs in 54 communities in 33 counties; 63 Speakers in the Schools programs in communities such as Brockton, Frenchtown, Harlowton and Miles City; and 41 grants totaling \$130,000 to organizations large and small throughout Montana.

As you can tell from this list of activities, we partner closely with the organizations that would benefit directly from Bill 264, especially Montana State Parks, the Montana Historical Society,

and the Montana Arts Council. We can confirm that these organizations and the many museums, libraries and schools around Montana that comprise Montana's cultural tourism infrastructure are doing their best with very limited means. So many libraries and museums in rural communities must make do with part-time staff, limited funds, and limited hours. They simply do not have the capacity to make the most of Montana's extraordinary historical and literary legacy.

To take but one example: We work closely with a small library in a rural community in northwestern Montana by providing grants to support reading and discussion programs for residents and visitors. That library employs a single part-time staff member and so that individual—and volunteers—must cover many bases. It's simply not possible to do justice to the legacy of the region with this constricted capacity.

Appropriating 30% of the annual Accommodations and Rental Vehicle Sales Tax for historic preservation and cultural tourism will assure far more stable funding for these organizations throughout Montana, allowing for longer hours, better services, deeper treatment of our shared history, and more engaging outreach. In short, this bill will prove transformative for so many small cultural organizations—and their communities.

Since the bill is revenue neutral, this is a win-win for Montana: Develop cultural tourism, a core economic engine for Montana, and budget responsibly for the state.

Thank you for attending to my testimony. I hope you will strongly support this important bill.